THE

Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

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CIMA on Community Defense against ICE

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The Final Straw Radio

An interview with Dulce, a member of Companeros Inmigrantes en las Montanas en Accion, or CIMA, a local organizing and advocacy group by and for immigrants in western NC about her experience working for dignity and solidarity in light of the current and past administrations. More on CIMA can be found at ***CIMAWNC.Org***

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TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself for the audience with your name, affiliations, pronouns and location?

Dulce: Hi everybody. My name is Dulce, I am a part of the team of CIMA (Companeros Inmigrantes en las Montanas en Accion). My pronouns are she/her, and I'm in Asheville.

TFSR: Could you talk about the work of CIMA, the communities that you operate in and serve, and what the goals of the group are?

D: Yes. The main purpose of CIMA is to fight for the rights of migrant and immigrant people in Western North Carolina, and we do that through advocacy, through fighting against anti-immigrant laws. We also do a lot of educational programs and workshops for the community. For example, currently, we are doing workshops on knowing your rights, and one of the missions and objectives is to have a community that is organized, prepared and educated. Our vision for the community is that they can take care of one another.

TFSR: So, because the acronym is in Spanish, is it fair to say that the majority of the communities that you work with are from primarily Spanish-speaking countries or communities, or do you work with a wider scope as well, or collaborate with other immigrant solidarity groups that may focus on other language groups in the area?

D: The majority of our work is with the Latino community, but we are allies to other immigrant communities and other languages that they may speak.

TFSR: Can you say a little bit about some of the history of CIMA? Like how it came about and why it was formed?

D: CIMA began somewhere between the years 2002 and 2001. After the twin towers had fallen, and we started to see a rise of different laws that were creating what we know now as the immigration system. So, CIMA saw the need to respond.

TFSR: So recently, this region experienced a terrible disaster after Hurricane Helene came through. I wonder if you could speak a little bit anecdotally about the experiences during this election season - when there was a lot of anti-immigrant rhetoric nationally, but also regionally - about some of the experiences of Latino immigrants and other people to the disaster and people feeling safe to access resources or being

D (cont'd): disrupt because there are unjust actions against the immigrant community. A community that is not only providing an economic strength to the country, but also a labor force that is needed, languages that are being shared, culture that is being shared and loved on by many people of the country, that we've been open to share with other people, as well as food. Many people enjoy the food of immigrant communities and are in support of the immigrant community. Really whatever skills you can provide, your abilities, your time and simply accompanying a family member or friend who is going through this vulnerable time, can make the biggest impact.

TFSR: I'm reminded of the large demonstrations that have happened in the last week across the country, particularly demonstrations in Phoenix, Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego. And also calls for people to have one day strikes and refuse to purchase or refuse to go to work, in solidarity with communities facing deportations, and these are similar to calls from the early 2000's. Like in 2005, 2006, there were massive demonstrations or boycott days in solidarity with immigrants. Methods to these events, are they inspirational, or...?

D: I think it's powerful to join in large manifestations and protests, especially to show what you value, and what your values are. And when they are threatening you constantly with separation of families and detentions, of course you should feel the power to use your right to protest. It's powerful to be able to say, "I don't agree with this administration. I don't agree with these laws". Being outside to share that, and vocalize that, and manifest that can empower others to raise their voices and share what they believe is right.

TFSR: Do you have any resources that you would suggest for people to keep informed on the issues impacting their community members as pertains to deportations, criminalization and solidarity?

D: Yes. So currently, YouTube has so many videos of training yourself to know your rights. I think that's the fastest thing that comes to mind. There's also apps to learn what your rights are. And there are organizations on a national level, like the ACLU, who are constantly sharing the constitutional rights of people. I would suggest getting closer to an organization that can help you know your rights if you ever come across an ICE agent or police. We also have CIMA as a resource and our community hotline, which is 1-888-839-2839. This is a phone number that you can call if you do see ICE in our neighborhoods, or if a family member has been detained by ICE.

TFSR: And CIMA is on Instagram and Facebook, right? And you have a website that's was cimawnc.org. Thank you so much for having this conversation, and also thank you so much for the interpretation. I much appreciated you both taking time out of your very busy days to do this, and I hope that the audience gets a lot out of this conversation.
D: Thank you.

D: Well, the Department of Hendersonville police have already been in agreements with ICE. Aside from HB 10, which is a statewide law, the Hendersonville Police Department has agreed to be a part of the 287(g) program. Which is an agreement that says once someone enters the jail, the jail has the right to run through identity databases to share the migratory status of the person they detained, so that ICE can know that they are there. In Buncombe County, the sheriff's department at some point will have to follow the laws like HB 10, but currently it's a lot less likely that someone will be deported if you are arrested in Buncombe County compared to Henderson County. The negative effects that this has, is that law enforcement is breaking the trust with the community, especially those who have been victims of crimes or victims of violence, because there isn't a trusted source to call for help.

TFSR: You've mentioned three ways that people can get engaged in defending the communities from potential raids or deportations and build community. The first being to observe the police, which is legal in different ways in different places. In North Carolina, you can film the police, but in some states like Illinois, I think it's illegal, or you can get in trouble for it. Then talking to your neighbors and getting a good communication system going. And a third step, doing an ICE watch sort of thing, and keeping up on a wider scale. Can you talk in more detail if there's any other suggestions besides those immediate interventions against law enforcement, that listeners who aren't already involved in some of these programs could start supporting folks that are in danger of raids and deportations? Maybe if there are other programs that CIMA does that are open to more participation?

D: Of course. I think in this time, especially for those who are listening, it's time to join an organization, or to go and get more involved with the schools, or to get more involved with the church in your area. Or simply, if you have a coworker or a friend that you know is a vulnerable person in this time, you can offer them a ride to work or offer them a ride home. I mentioned the schools, because with the new administrative changes, places like schools and churches are not safe or sanctuary places like they once were. So when ICE comes, those who are involved with the schools or churches need to be witnesses and be able to see that if ICE raids a school, that they are actually following the law and not making false arrests or arrests without an actual warrant, and so that ICE is not using a warrant that isn't signed by a judge and making arrests that are, at this point, like kidnapping.There's also this way to support that's economic. Maybe you don't be involved in an organization or get closer to a church, but you could provide a small financial donation to support families going through those unexpected expenses. For example, having to meet with a lawyer for the first time, or having fees that you didn't know you were going to have. I would also say, to start joining protests in your local community that are causing disruption. Of course, protests may be an inconvenience to a lot of people. They think that it's annoying or frustrating, but we need to

TFSR (cont'd): scapegoated, or accused of crimes or what have you, in relation to the disaster? Does that question make sense?

D: For the Latino community that we serve, it was a feeling that there wasn't safe places to access the federal support, like FEMA. We actually saw a lot of ways that the community couldn't access resources that came after the hurricane.

TFSR: So, that refers to the access to federal resources. There were also rumors spread around this time. For instance, unrelated to the disaster in Springfield, Ohio, of members of the Haitian immigrant community attacking people's animals. Around the same time as the storm hit, there were rumors in western North Carolina of looting, or of people stealing that were often framed in a racial manner, that seemed like they would also make communities feel less safe around their neighbors, and not just around authorities. Could you speak to this, or even being able to access survival needs from places, like nearby churches or community groups. Is this something that you have heard of people experiencing?

D: I believe that the anti-immigrant rhetoric has grown, not only during the times of the hurricane, but from before the hurricane. What I can say is that during the time of the hurricane in certain communities, for example, in Emma, there was a lot of solidarity from people to people. Of course, there were churches and other groups that were able to provide support, and that were born in this time. But again, the support was between people, and not from the government. In fact, in Emma, when the free market was born from the hurricane, which is our mutual aid project, we met Haitian, Russian, Ukrainian and even white people from our community. I believe that solidarity and mutual aid lessened the anti-immigrant ideas, or the ideas that immigrants are criminals, because they were able to meet us, and we all were able to benefit from the resources that came.

TFSR: So, the Trump administration has promised for a long time, and is showing signs of starting to push through a very strong anti-immigrant agenda of supporting and forcing federal law enforcement to seek people who were not born in the United States or who don't have permanent status, in a way that's often going to be racialized policing. Could you talk a bit about how you're feeling right now, and what you're hearing from the community in terms of the dangers of what appears to be happening now?

D: Of course. In this case, our community in particular, is a lot more vulnerable in many different aspects. All of these laws that are being signed - like HR 29, HR 30 - are laws that we've seen as anti-immigrant laws, for cops to be able to arrest more people. But what we've seen is that most of the arrests that have been occurring have been for people who have no criminal record. Behind these laws, and not only these laws, but the discourse of hate that these laws create, create not only hate and

D (cont'd): criminalization to our community, but has a bigger impact. Because these laws are reviving the racism that people believe in, and our people are more vulnerable to be victims of these people who believe they're Minute Men or empowered to do the work of the law, there are many negative impacts to our community. Fear and living in fear every day, being worried of being separated from your loved ones or family members. This is something that our community lives with, and not just our community here, but immigrant communities across the country. And many people today are saying that our community is criminal because they came in a form that wasn't, to them, legal. But I want to remind us of our history of the white communities that came without a legal pathway or permission to this land, to colonize the land from Native communities, not in the legal way. They came with the force to take away other people's land. And in reality, they killed many Native people. And, so, knowing that history and saying that we are criminal for crossing a border when we are simply looking for better conditions for our lives, feels very contradictory. I just really want to be clear that I don't share that history as a way to share hate towards the white community, but more of just the facts of what happened.

TFSR: Yeah, and clearly, when politicians are talking about immigration in terms of an invasion, they're masking the deeper racist ideology that they're promoting. They're using different terms to sound like less hateful and really drive fear into already afraid white folks. Have you seen, since the election, an increase in clear, racial vigilantism from around Western North Carolina against immigrants? Even if you haven't, obviously, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist or isn't going to happen, but I wonder, if you've seen any examples that you could share.

D: I can think of, within a local context, how this community is divided by two groups of people who are allies and love the immigrant community, and the other side of people who hate the immigrant community but have never taken a physical, violent action besides words. Verbal abuse is something that community does experience. In neighboring states like South Carolina, there have been cases where citizens are acting as if they were ICE agents and began to terrorize members of the immigrant community.

TFSR: I've witnessed many people sharing photographs of law enforcement around here in Western North Carolina, or concerns that ICE is driving down the road or conducting a raid, and that news has turned out, so far, to be unverified. I'd like you to speak about the presence of federal law enforcement that you and your organization are aware of so far, and how you deal with potential instances of immigration law enforcement in the area.

D: Of course. We have seen a large rise of policing in our area, especially by police undercover, or state troopers that are undercover. We receive a lot of reports of ICE in this area because they aren't wearing

D (cont'd):anything that can identify them as ICE. And with the President and Tom Hoffman saying that they were planning to deport many people, it's very common that fear and anxiety is in the community.

TFSR: But while it's realistic that the fear is in the community, and that people should be prepared, can you talk about how CIMA engages with and informs the community?

D: I think the first line of defense that our community has, is really knowing your rights and being vigilant of their surroundings. If you see a suspicious car, or not opening the doors, not answering questions, if being questioned by the police, especially at your workplace, knowing what your rights are and that we have the right to remain silent if we're talking to a local or a federal agent. Of course, this is not just for the Latino community, but the immigrant community from wherever you come from. Most people may come and think that they have no rights, but all of us have rights as humans, and we need to learn how to use them. Then the second line of defense that I would share is that within neighborhoods, we are able to protect each other. As neighbors, get to see each other, get to know each other, and create groups of communication within neighborhoods to share if ICE is present, and be able to watch the neighborhood. That's one sense, one way that we can feel safer. Then the last level I would share is that there is currently many organizations and allies doing what we understand as ICE watch. I hope this grows on a national level, so that anyone listening to this who's a citizen, you listening to us now, can be a part of this movement to watch ICE. If you see a car you don't know, if you see with your own eyes that ICE is in the area, and you have loved ones who are undocumented or a part of the immigrant community, being able to share with them that ICE is in the area and confirming it so that people can make decisions to protect themselves.

TFSR: In many parts of the country, local law enforcement has played the role of passing information to immigration police. And in some cases, detaining people based on their perception that someone doesn't have citizenship, or, according to them, shouldn't be here. Buncombe County, where Asheville is, has for a while, had sheriffs that have not actively participated in detaining people for immigration holds. However, Henderson County, just south of us, does. Because some of the changes that the Trump administration has made, have put responsibility for policing around immigration issues, or the ability for federal law enforcement to act on behalf of ICE. Or other organizations like Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Federal Bureau of Investigation; other organizations. I guess all the cars don't always look like ICE cars that could be stopping people and doing this kind of work. But at least my understanding is up until now, for a while in Buncombe, the local law enforcement has not been holding people for immigration purposes. Can you share what you know of that and how that came to be?